
 Session 1.1: Approaches through landscapes

Room 103

Chair: Angus Winchester

1.11 Tom Williamson – The origins of ‘champion’ landscapes in midland England: new evidence from Northamptonshire.

Most archaeologists believe that the familiar Midland landscapes of nucleated villages and extensive, ‘regular’ open fields originated in the middle and later Saxon periods. A settlement pattern of scattered farms and small hamlets was replaced by one of nucleated villages, many of which were apparently laid out in carefully planned form: open fields originated at the same time, or soon after, the whole change representing a ‘communalisation’ of agriculture directed from above by major landowners. A recent AHRC-funded GIS mapping project, studying Northamptonshire, now suggests that this story is largely mythical. Few parishes in the county contain more than one or two early Saxon settlements – there never was a ‘scattered’ early Saxon settlement pattern; ‘village planning’ is an illusion; and regular open fields are largely, if not entirely, a post-Conquest development. The twelfth century may be the key period both for the development of ‘champion’ landscapes, and for the emergence of strong regional variations in the English rural landscape more generally.

Tom Williamson is Professor of Landscape History at the University of East Anglia. His recent publications include: *Shaping Medieval Landscapes* (2003); *Rabbits, Warrens and Archaeology* (2007); *Sutton Hoo and its Landscape: the context of monuments* (2008); and *The Countryside of East Anglia: changing landscapes, 1870–1950* (with Susanna Wade Martins).

1.12 Brendan Chester-Kadwell – Historic routeways in the High Weald

The High Weald, despite its proximity to London, the Cinque Ports and other coastal settlements, has often been portrayed as a remote area. However, local farmers and entrepreneurs have traditionally relied on distant markets for the disposal of much of their produce. Previous studies have explored the economic relationship of the High Weald to these markets, but perhaps less attention has been paid to local agrarian organisation.

The High Weald’s rural economy reflects a complex history of resource exploitation from prehistory to the nineteenth century. This included a wide range of agricultural, pastoral and early industrial activities, which frequently overlapped and supplemented each other. Wealden farms depended on long distant routeways to maintain this economic activity and these routeways are generally considered to relate strongly to early settlement patterns: however, little detail is known about how this is manifested in local networks.

The paper is based on research into a small group of parishes along the Kent/East Sussex border in the vicinity of the river Rother. It will consider the role of ‘transhumance’, the size and distribution of Wealden farms (as they appear in the tithe surveys), and how farms used local lanes and common spaces in the management of the agrarian economy.

This paper is offered by the University of East Anglia, with the High Weald AONB Unit, and is an aspect of long-term projects into High Weald farms/routeways.

Brendan Chester-Kadwell is a member of the Landscape Group in the School of History, University of East Anglia (UEA, Norwich), where he is completing a doctoral thesis on rural settlement morphology in the Huntingdonshire Ouse Valley and the High Weald. He is also working on the High Weald Historic Routeways Project, which is a joint project with The High Weald AONB Unit. Brendan has given papers on topics relating to his doctoral research, and his MA dissertation (*Land Tenure in the Wealden Parishes of Rolvenden and Benenden: c.1600–1840*). He is also historic advisor to the Swiss Garden Restoration Project, Bedfordshire.

1.13 Lies Vervaeet – The estate management of the Bruges Saint John’s hospital before and after the Black Death: a geographical analysis

Many historians have focused on the estate management of large landowning institutions as an inroad to study structural changes in premodern rural society. Recent research has demonstrated that the so-called ‘late medieval crisis’ had a regionally divergent impact in the county of Flanders. In this context, much can be learned from the archives of the Saint John’s hospital of Bruges, one of the oldest and richest landowning institutions of Flanders. Those unusually rich archives, which have not yet been subject to thorough research, provide an excellent way to measure the impact of that crisis on the various rural estates of the hospital in different parts of Flanders. In my contribution, I will provide a geographical analysis of the hospital’s patrimony as described in two comprehensive land registers, dating respectively from 1337 and from 1420. This will allow for a diachronological analysis of the estates and their way of exploitation in the light of the impact of the Black Death, in the economically and demographically diverse region that was medieval Flanders.

Lies G. P. Vervaeet studied history at the Ghent University (Belgium) with specialisations in rural history and historical geography. Her Master’s thesis focused on the socio-economic organisation of a Flemish rural village. Central question was whether that specific organisation was reflected in the layout of the village’s cultivated area. On the first of July 2008 she was appointed as research assistant at the Department of Medieval History of the Ghent University. Lies is preparing a PhD on rural history, under the supervision of Prof. dr. Erik Thoen. Subject of her PhD is the administration of the rural estates of the Saint John’s hospital in Bruges during the late middle ages. She wants to investigate how an urban charitable institution managed its rural estates while the countryside underwent a transformation from a traditional peasant society to a more commercial society.